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Annual Report
OF THE
MEDICAL OFFICER
OF HEALTH
TO THE
HARPENDEN
Urban District Council
FOR THE YEAR 1920.



Census Figures in 1911:

AREA IN ACRES, 1631.

POPULATION, 6173

NUMBER OF INHABITED HOUSES, 1401


AVERAGE NUMBER PER HOUSE, 4·4



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REPORT, 1920.

GENTLEMEN,

A new memorandum of the Ministry of Health necessitates a variation in the form of my usual Annual Report.

Natural and Social Conditions of the District.

No distinction is made now between birth-rate and death-rate populations, the figure for both being given as 6,588. At the Census of 1911, it was 6,173. The district is mainly a residential one, and mostly of business men going to London and Luton. Several factories give employment to men and women.

65 deaths were registered, 37 males and 28 females, giving a death-rate of 9.8 per thousand. In 1919 it was 8.5. For England and Wales in 1920 it is 12.4 and for 148 of the smaller towns 11.3.

3 of the deaths were from the usual infectious diseases, 2 from Influenza and 1 from Whooping Cough. There were 3 deaths from Pulmonary Tuberculosis, 6 from all forms of Pneumonia, and 13 from Cancer and Malignant diseases.

The births registered were 114, including 61 males and 53 females, three of the latter being illegitimate. The birth-rate is 17.2 per thousand. For England and Wales it is 25.4 and for 148 smaller towns 24.9. There was one death from Diarrhoea under two years, and 2 deaths of infants under one year.

Sanitary Circumstances of the District.

Water.—A sufficient and constant supply of good and pure, though rather hard water, is maintained by the Harpenden Water Works from deep wells in the chalk.

Rivers and Streams.—The River Lea on the eastern border of the district receives the effluent from the Sewage Works. A satisfactory degree of purity is maintained.

Drainage and Sewerage.—During the year 19 houses have been linked up with the public sewers, making a total of 1,195 out of a possible 1,415. About 100 of the houses unconnected are in outlying parts or in roads not yet sewered.

Previous reports have described in detail the methods of purification adopted at the Works. It is sufficient to add that analyses of the effluent show that it is quite satisfactory.

The quantity of sewage dealt with was 42,801,886 gallons of which 3,857,300 were pumped from the low level system. About 740 tons of screening and sludge were removed.

The efficiency and appearance of the detritus chambers, have both been improved by the construction of a half-round channel with a catch-pit. The formation of thick offensive and decomposing scum, which had to be removed by manual labour is thus prevented.

The additional layer of slates on some of the beds has improved their appearance. At the works as a whole there is now nothing offensive to the eye or nose.

2,963,067 gallons of storm water received partial treatment.

Closet Accommodation.—I have mentioned that the great majority of houses are connected with the sewers and are therefore provided with water closets. There are approximately 60 privies, 40 with moveable receptacles (pail closets), and 20 with fixed receptacles.

Scavenging.—The removal and disposal of house refuse and the cleansing of the pail closets are carried out by the same contractor. The area dealt with has been extended, and includes all but a very few houses. House refuse is dumped into a deep disused gravel pit, covered with earth and sown with grass. The contents of closet pails are ploughed into arable land. The work is carried out in a satisfactory manner and there are few complaints.

Sanitary Inspection of the District :—

Houses inspected in routine	...	...	...	...	310
„ „ on complaint	...	...	...	...	20
„ „ after infectious disease	...	...	...	...	25
Visits to Schools	...	...	...	...	6
Inspections of Bakehouses	...	...	...	...	12
„ „ Laundries	...	...	...	...	8
„ „ Slaughterhouses	...	...	...	...	7
„ „ Cowsheds	...	...	...	...	8
„ „ Factories and Workshops	...	...	...	...	47
Privies abolished	...	...	...	...	8
Pail closets converted to water closets	...	...	...	...	12
New drains constructed	...	...	...	...	20
Premises connected to sewers	...	...	...	...	18
Yards paved or paving repaired	...	...	...	...	8
New dustbins provided	...	...	...	...	12
Premises disinfected	...	...	...	...	25
Cases of overcrowding abated	...	...	...	...	3
Premises repaired, roofs, ceilings, walls, etc., and cleansed	...	...	...	...	38
Nuisances from dampness abated	...	...	...	...	6
Nuisances from animals, pigs, fowls, etc., abated	...	...	...	...	4
Cesspools emptied by Council's men	...	...	...	...	25
Cesspools abolished	...	...	...	...	8
Sample of water analysed	...	...	...	...	1
Premises condemned	...	...	...	...	0
Notices served (statutory)	...	...	...	...	10
„ „ (preliminary)	...	...	...	...	35

Premises and Occupations which can be controlled by Bye-laws and Regulations.—No action was taken or needed in regard to houses let in lodgings, offensive trades, etc. There are no underground sleeping rooms.

Other Sanitary conditions requiring notice.—The impending inadequacy of burial accommodation in the Parish Churchyard being brought to the notice of the Council by the Vestry, the Local Authority has after much searching obtained an option on what it considers a suitable site. A Government inquiry will probably be held shortly. It is estimated that with a normal death-rate the present churchyard will not be available for more than four years, and in the event of an epidemic for a much shorter period.

Schools.—The Sanitary conditions and water supply of the Public Elementary Schools are quite satisfactory. The infant

department of the Church of England School No. 86 was closed on February 20th for six weeks for whooping cough, and on May 3rd for three weeks for measles.

Food.

(a) *Milk Supply*.—4 Cowsheds have been inspected and periodically limewhited. I think it can be said that the milk produced within or imported into the district is wholesome, and that the arrangements for its supply and distribution are adequate. The taking of samples is under the jurisdiction of the County Council.

(b) *Meat*.—There is no public abattoir. The condition of the three slaughterhouses has been satisfactory. Meat is inspected in the slaughterhouses and butchers' shops. 11 carcasses were found to be unfit for food either from tuberculosis or other causes. These were destroyed by the inspector with the consent of the owners. No legal proceedings were necessary.

All the slaughterhouses (3 in number) were in use in 1914, and in January and December 1920.

(c) *Bakehouses*.—There are 6 of these. They were periodically inspected and the regulations were carried out.

Prevalence of, and control over, Infectious Diseases.

Infectious Diseases Generally.—The notifications consisted of 6 cases of Pulmonary Tuberculosis; 2 Non-Pulmonary; 12 Scarlet Fever (8 removed to Hospital); 7 Diphtheria (6 removed to Hospital); 3 Malaria; 1 Pneumonia; 2 Erysipelas; 1 Cerebro-spinal Fever; 1 Encephalitis Lethargica; and 1 of Ophthalmia Neonatorum, making 36 in all. In addition there were small attacks of Whooping Cough in the early part of the year, and of measles in the summer.

The Council makes arrangements for the examination of throat swabs, the supply of diphtheria antitoxin in necessitous cases, and the examination of sputum for tubercle bacilli. These were largely taken advantage of—38 throat swabs and 13 samples of sputum were reported upon. In the case of Cerebro-spinal Fever, the infection was contracted abroad. The diagnosis was confirmed by the discovery of the meningo coccus in the Cerebro-spinal fluid. Unfortunately the patient died in the Isolation Hospital.

Maternity and Child Welfare.

This department is of course under the control of the County Council. But it may not be out of place to remark upon the very great advantage to the scheme of the facilities provided, and the excellent arrangements made at the new Harpenden Memorial Nursing Centre. Of the cases of infectious disease affecting parturient women and infants, I have under their heading to mention only the single case of ophthalmia neonatorum. The child recovered with both eyes uninjured. The patient and mother, under arrangements with the County Council, were received into, and treated at the St. Albans Hospital.

Sanitary Administration.

Hospital Accommodation.—This is provided under a joint scheme with St. Albans City and the St. Albans Rural District. The Sisters' Hospital takes cases of Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria—8 of the former, and 6 of the latter were admitted from Harpenden. The Small Pox Hospital at the Cherry Tree Farm has never been used. There is no provision for enteric cases. In the past it has been possible to nurse the small number which have occurred in the patients own homes—nurses having been provided in suitable cases by the Council. The case of Cerebro-spinal Fever was admitted to the Sisters' Hospital.

Adoptive Acts and Byelaws in Force.

The Infectious Diseases (Prevention) Act 1890 and the Public Health Acts (Amendment Act 1890, Part III), are both in force in this district.

The majority of the Adoptive Parts of the Public Health Acts (Amendment Act) 1907 are now in force.

The following byelaws have been adopted, confirmed by the Local Government Board, and are in force; New Streets and Buildings, Drainage of Existing Building, Prevention of Nuisances, Slaughter Houses, Means of Escape in Case of Fire, Houses Let in Lodgings, Common Lodging Houses, Tents, Vans, Sheds, etc., Offensive Trades, Regulations with respect to Dairies, Cowsheds and Milkshops.

Bacteriological work, including examination of throat swabs and material for the detection of tubercle bacilli, is undertaken by arrangement with the Royal Institute of Public Health, Russell Square.

Professor Kenwood makes, once a year, a chemical analysis of the Public Water Supply. His last report stated that the water reached a satisfactory standard of purity.

Housing.

In dealing with unfit houses, one has to take into consideration, in addition to Acts of Parliament, the question of supply. So that the expression "reasonably fit for human habitation" must perforce be interpreted, as far as structure is concerned, more leniently than if the circumstances were different. I stated in my last report that the plan of the Housing Site for 64 houses had been approved by the Ministry of Health, and that the plans of the houses were under consideration by the Council. Yet, although a short road and sewer have been constructed, and plans of the cottages approved by the Council and the Ministry, and though the date of the resolution to buy the land was July 1919, not a brick has yet been laid to provide the much needed houses. This is not the fault of the Council. Delay has been caused at every step, even after approval by the introduction of amendments and alterations by the Housing Commissioner, notwithstanding the fact that the drawings, designs and specifications, etc., were prepared in accordance with the "Manual and Specification of the Ministry of Health." Tenders were obtained from 9 Builders of Harpenden and adjoining towns so as to get competitive prices. Now the Council, just before the issue of this report, is informed that the plans previously approved must be cut down, and fresh tenders invited.

I have to thank the Sanitary Inspector, Mr. J. H. Leverton for his advice and assistance.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

HUGH FRASER, M.A., M.B., C.M.

June 1st, 1921.

APPENDICES.

HOUSING CONDITIONS.

STATISTICS.

Year ended 31st December 1920.

1.—GENERAL.

1. Estimated population	6,588
2. General death-rate	9·8
3. Death-rate from tuberculosis	·4
4. Infantile mortality	17·
5. Number of dwelling-houses of all classes	1513
6. Number of working-class dwelling-houses	935
7. Number of new working-class houses erected	0

2.—UNFIT DWELLING-HOUSES.**I.—Inspection.**

Total number of dwelling-houses inspected for housing defects (under Public Health or Housing Acts)	460
Number of dwelling-houses found to be in a state so dangerous or injurious to health as to be unfit for human habitation ...	0
Number of dwelling-houses (exclusive of those referred to under the preceding sub-heading) found not to be in all respects reasonably fit for human habitation	20

II.—Remedy of defects without Service of formal Notices.

Number of defective dwelling-houses rendered fit in consequence of informal action by the Local Authority or their officers ...	20
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III.—Action under Statutory Powers.*A. Proceedings under section 28 of the Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1919.*

Number of dwelling-houses which were rendered fit—	
(a) by owners	20
(b) by Local Authority in default of owners ...	0
Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Closing Orders became operative in pursuance of declarations by owners of intention to close	0

B. Proceedings under Public Health Acts.

Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which notices were served requiring defects to be remedied ...	55
Number of dwelling-houses in which defects were remedied—	
(a) by owners	55
(b) by Local Authority in default of owners ...	0

C. Proceedings under sections 17 and 18 of the Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1909.

1.	Number of representations made with a view to the making of Closing Orders	}	0
2.	Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Closing Orders were made	...	...	...
3.	Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Closing Orders were determined, the dwelling-houses having been rendered fit	...	...	...
4.	Number of dwelling-houses in respect of which Demolition Orders were made	...	...	...
5.	Number of dwelling-houses demolished in pursuance of Demolition Orders	...	...	...

3.—UNHEALTHY AREAS.

Areas represented to the Local Authority with a view to Improvement Schemes under (a), Part I., or (b), Part II., of the Act of 1890:—

1.	Name of area	}	0
2.	Acreage	...	...	...	...	...
3.	Number of working-class houses in area	...	...	...	...	...
4.	Number of working-class persons to be displaced	...	...	...	...	...

4.—Number of houses not complying with the building byelaws erected with consent of Local Authority under section 25 of the Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1919